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DEPARTMENT OF NURSING EDUCATION

IN CHARGE OF

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HOW SECONDARY-SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS CAN HELP TO PUSH NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS IN NURSING¹

It has always been a little difficult to make the general public realize how vitally important the work of the nurse has become in our national economy, and how essential it is that we should have, for our many forms of community health service, a very much larger body of well-trained nurses. The war has made us see, through the vivid and symbolical figure of the war nurse, the part which this profession is playing and must increasingly play in conserving the life blood of our people. It has shown us that our country leans just as heavily on its trained army of life-savers, as on its battalions of fighters, and that the recruiting and training of an adequate nursing force is just as essential to the ultimate success of our war aims, as the preparation of any other branch of the army and navy service.

It is a matter of great thankfulness that this country, owing to the foresight of the Red Cross, was probably better equipped than any country has ever been to send immediately into the field a thoroughly trained body of nurses, but with all our available resources, we will not be able to keep up with the draft, unless we can push forward our preparations now rapidly for the years to come. We know that more than any other one body in the country, you have the power to help us, and we are coming to you with the fullest confidence that you will give us your sympathetic and hearty coöperation and support in this difficult task.

The first and most urgent need is for more nursing recruits. The Red Cross is calling for many more nurses, all of whom must be graduate trained nurses. The hospital training schools are opening their doors to admit as many pupils as it is possible for them to accommodate, and we must see that they are supplied with the material to train for our national nursing service. You will realize how essential it is that we should have for this work the most reliable, capable and intelligent young women we can find. They must of course be physically fit, and especially in a time like this, when there

¹This open letter to principals and teachers of high schools and private schools was prepared by the Education Committee of the New York State League of Nursing Education, for distribution in that state. Copies may be secured by writing to Miss Isabel Stewart, Teachers College.

is danger of people rushing into nursing because of the excitement and romance which are popularly associated with it, we cannot be too careful in choosing dignified and wholesome young women who can keep their heads, and who can be depended upon to stick to their task without self-advertising or heroics.

We ask you to bring before your various classes and more especially your graduates of the last two or three years, if you can reach them, the urgent need for young women of this stamp in the country's nursing service. And will you make it quite clear to them that this is no temporary war service? The work of protecting and saving human life will be greatly extended after the war, and this country and the countries abroad will need every good nurse that can be trained, so it is important that every girl who goes into this work should look to the future as well as the present need, and should prepare herself in the best possible way to do her full part. Fortunately she can take this training and at the same time be giving the most valuable service in one of our home hospitals, so there is no reason for rushing madly into short-cut, makeshift courses which give no kind of preparation for real nursing and which in fact will lead her nowhere. The length of the regular course in most hospitals is three years, but during the war, senior students may be released earlier for work in military hospitals and for other forms of war service.

Will you also impress on all those pupils who are planning to enter nursing schools, the supreme importance of completing their full period of secondary training? There is no future in nursing today for the girl who does not bring a good sound education. During the last few years a much larger number of college women have been coming into the nursing ranks, but while women of higher education will always be given preference, the larger proportion of pupils in training will be made up of high school and private school graduates. Since very few nursing schools admit pupils under the age of twenty years, there is absolutely no excuse for any girl leaving school early to enter nursing. All the better training schools demand high school graduation for admission, and in several states this is compulsory for all registered training schools. Similar measures are now under consideration in all parts of the country, so the girl who hopes to enter this profession will save herself a great deal of future trouble by securing her high school diploma before leaving school.

If it is at all possible for her to take a year or two of advanced work in high school or college she will have a much better foundation for success in nursing. Several universities are now giving the Bachelor of Science degree in nursing for a combined course of four

to five years, about one-half of this time being spent in academic and one-half in professional work. While the degree will never make up for the lack of personal qualities or professional efficiency, it is a decided asset, especially in the higher positions in educational and public health work, and even in the stress of war time, capable students should be urged to consider the advantages of this broader and sounder preparation.

For those who will not take more than the regular high school or private school course, the arrangement of a good program of study is a matter of great importance. It should be emphatically stated that the leaders in nursing education are opposed to any vocational course for prospective nursing students during the high school period, and that they would not approve any form of technical specialization which would deprive the student of the broadest cultural training or debar her from admission to an ordinary college. Apart from its bearing on her personal development, this kind of an education is an invaluable professional asset. Because nursing involves such intimate human relationships, and because all the newer branches, particularly, are so distinctly social and educational in their purpose, the nurse's personality and her cultural background are generally decisive factors in her success and are indeed of positive therapeutic as well as social value. It is therefore most important that the prospective nurse should have every opportunity to enrich her fund of general knowledge, to train her judgment, to broaden her sympathies, to cultivate her tastes and to acquire such experience as will enable her to understand and deal with people of all classes and kinds.

There is, however, a technical and scientific as well as a social and educational side to the nurse's work, and it is well not to overlook the practical as well as the cultural values in her preliminary training. The nurse requires the same kind of quick and discriminating observation and judgment that the doctor does, she must have deft and well-trained hands and a cool head and she must be a capable, practical worker, as well as a good manager. The high school can scarcely be expected to develop all these qualities, but it can help her to select those studies and activities which would be more likely to contribute to their development.

The first essential is a good foundation in English. Especially in educational and organizing work, nurses who are able to express themselves clearly and effectively, both in speaking and writing, have an immense advantage, and in the personal work with patients the woman of refined speech who is fairly well acquainted with the resources of standard English literature has an unfailing key to the

most difficult situation. To be able to reach the many different races with whom the nurse has to deal, one would need to master the elements of several modern languages, but even one is of great help, and at the present time either French or Italian would probably be most useful. Without entering into any discussion as to the cultural value of Latin, it is generally felt by nurses that even one year of this subject, gives them a better mastery of the medical vocabulary, so one would be inclined to recommend at least this amount of Latin, if time can be given to it.

Few branches of professional work are so intimately bound up with the social problems of the community as nursing is, and no worker needs more, the sympathetic interest in races and peoples which the study of history gives, and the clear understanding of the nature and meaning of our social and civic institutions which comes from a good course in history and civics. After the history of her own country, a study of modern European history is usually found most profitable for the future nurse. If this could be supplemented by a course, possibly in political geography, giving her a clearer idea of the important racial groups and their economic, political and social backgrounds, she would be much better prepared to meet the problems which arise in her dealing with our foreign-born population. If, as has been recently advocated, some introductory work should be given in economics, sociology, and psychology, during the high school period, it would strengthen the social side of her preparation very much.

High school mathematics should be reduced to the lowest possible minimum for such a student. She will need to be able to compute problems in proportion and percentage, and to handle readily tables of weights and measures, including the metric system. Apart from the mathematics which she will need in chemistry and physics, this is all she will actually use, and unfortunately even those who have covered years of high school mathematics, usually show a very hazy memory of these fundamental arithmetical processes.

On the scientific side, the pre-nursing course would be very similar to the pre-medical course, laying particular stress on the biological and physical sciences. The point-of-view and the method of training pupils in the sciences are almost as important as the content. Good, strong courses in human physiology, hygiene and sanitation, elementary bacteriology, chemistry and physics (all applied to everyday problems), would give an excellent foundation on which to build a nursing training. Botany and physical geography, though somewhat limited in their application to nursing, would be helpful, and might be considered as possible electives.

There is much in common between the field of nursing and that of home economics or household science. Though less fundamental than the two groups previously discussed, such subjects as cooking and nutrition, cleaning and household sanitation, give an excellent introduction to the practical work in the hospital. The group of subjects dealing with clothing and house furnishing, would be relatively of much less importance, except from the sanitary point of view.

High school courses in home nursing and the care of children, if taught by someone who has a real feeling for nursing and a good understanding of the field, would be valuable as a means of quickening the vocational interest and motivating the work of the other subjects. The necessary limitations of such courses in a high school make them of little technical value, but particularly in the present crisis, when trained nurses must be released for the care of the more acute and serious illnesses, senior high school girls may be able, with the help of such a course, to assist in caring for ordinary slight or chronic conditions in their own homes, or to help in day nurseries or children's summer camps. Such experience would be a good background for their professional training, but it must be distinctly understood that it can no more begin to prepare a girl for the actual duties of a trained nurse, than a popular course in first aid can prepare one for the work of a physician.

Music and voice training, physical culture (including games and folk dancing), art and craft work, and other accomplishments are all likely to prove very useful in nursing, especially in work with nervous and mental cases, where occupations and diversions are largely used as a form of treatment, and with children and convalescents.

While not advocating any rigid program of study for such a girl, it is believed that the following distribution of time in the regular four-year course would be satisfactory, providing it can be adjusted to meet the requirements for graduation.

English	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 to 4 years
Language	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 to 3 years
Mathematics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 year
History (including civics)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 to 3 years
Science (chemistry, physics and biology)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 to 4 years
Household Science	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 to 2 years
Miscellaneous (drawing, music, physical education, etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 to 2 years

Students who take advanced work should be advised to round out their training in the social, scientific and practical household

subjects as far as possible. Students who return to high school or night school to make up deficiencies for admission to nursing schools, should be urged to take general cultural and science courses, and should not be encouraged to put their time into commercial and technical subjects, as we find they often do.

Another way in which principals and teachers in secondary schools can be of great service to their prospective nursing students as well as to the nursing profession, is by advising them how to discriminate between good and poor schools. Many a promising student has had her professional prospects ruined by entering a poor school. The first essential is that the school should be registered in the state, otherwise the graduate has no recognized standing and will not be eligible for the title of R.N. or for enrollment in the Red Cross. The next essential is that it should be connected with a hospital of good standing in the community, providing training and experience in the four branches of medical, surgical, children's, and obstetrical nursing. If the hospital can offer also training in the care of communicable and nervous and mental diseases, or in social service or visiting nursing, it is a distinct asset. A general hospital of average size (200 to 300 beds) with a fairly active service, will usually afford an excellent field for training, while the small private hospital, special hospital, or institution for chronic patients is manifestly unable to give the experience necessary for a good all-round training. The hospital which cares for large numbers of free patients in open wards is able to give much better opportunities for observation and training than the hospital which caters largely to private patients.

If the hospital in the pupil's own community or state is of good standing and able to give good, sound, theoretical and practical training it is usually advisable to apply for training there, rather than to risk a far-away hospital, unless its standing is known to be decidedly superior. A good teaching and lecturing staff, a well-trained corps of supervisors, and adequate teaching facilities are essential here as in all other kinds of schools, and in addition one should make sure that housing and living conditions for pupil nurses are attractive and healthful and that hours of duty are reasonable. Several of the leading hospitals in the country have an eight-hour day and every effort should be made to induce all hospitals to adopt similar measures. It may be necessary to caution teachers as well as pupils not to judge the standing of the hospital nursing school by size or buildings, or by the work of its physicians and surgeons, but by the educational standards of the nursing school, and by the efficiency of its pupils and graduates.

It would be quite unfair, however, to judge nursing schools by

exactly the same standards which you would apply to your own field of education. It is well to remember that the hospital is not primarily an educational institution and its educational functions are often subordinated to the immediate pressing problem of getting its patients cared for. This, frankly, is what every nursing school exists for, and though the system is capable of abuse, it provides the one essential and invaluable element of any good system of vocational education, a real practice field. In this human laboratory, vital problems, literally of life and death, challenge the pupil at every turn, theory and practice walk together, hand in hand, and the tests are not tests of book knowledge merely, but are exacting tests of morale, of character, of skill, of accomplishment and of human service.

Where the hospital may often be weak, however, is in the quality of its theoretical instruction, and secondary or technical schools, especially in the smaller towns and cities, may be able to help struggling hospitals to maintain better schools, by putting at the disposal of their students some of the educational facilities which the hospital may find it exceedingly difficult to supply. At the present time, when the teaching staffs of all hospitals are much disorganized by the enrollment of many of our best nurses and doctors for foreign service, and when hospital finances are more than usually depleted by the many extra demands on the generosity of contributors and the high cost of living, the problem of maintaining an efficient educational system in nursing schools is a very difficult one. The hospitals may be depended on to do all in their power to increase the supply of nurses, but unless the community stands behind to give financial aid and to assist and support the overburdened officers of the training schools, there is a danger that we may fail to measure up to our obligations to those sick and wounded men across the seas, as well as to the sick at home.

Most of the subjects given in the nursing school must be taught by nurses or physicians, but there are some of the introductory sciences which might very well be taught in an adjacent high school if satisfactory arrangements could be made as to time, and if the teacher would be willing to adapt the work to meet the needs of this particular group of students. Several high schools and technical schools are now giving special courses in chemistry and cookery to pupils from nursing schools and there seems no reason why anatomy and physiology, hygiene, and elementary bacteriology might not be included if the high school can provide competent teachers in these branches. Where the high school has well equipped class rooms and scientific laboratories, it might place these at the disposal of the hospital nursing school even if it cannot supply the teachers. An ele-

mentary course in drugs and solutions which is usually given in the early part of the nursing course is largely devoted to drilling the students in problems of proportion, percentage and measurement. A part of this work could be quite satisfactorily taught by any mathematics teacher. A special kind of simple lettering, which is used in hospitals for the clinical charts and records, could be taught by any art teacher and practice provided till speed and legibility are secured. There seems to be no reason why such courses as these should not be open to any students who may wish to enter a nursing school, as well as to those already enlisted. An arrangement could probably be made with the nursing school to exempt such students from subjects satisfactorily completed, and to let them go ahead a little more rapidly in their practical work.

Of course it will be seen at once that the whole public policy in regard to nursing schools is entirely at fault. It is difficult to understand why immense sums of public money should be spent to endow all forms of commercial, agricultural, technical, professional, and military schools and why nursing schools, which supply to the community school nurses, infant welfare and tuberculosis nurses, visiting nurses for cities and rural districts, and social service nurses of many kinds, as well as a perfect army of hospital, private, Army and Navy nurses, should be compelled to struggle along with absolutely no endowments and the most limited and uncertain kind of financial support. When the time comes, as it must very soon, to put the whole system of nursing education on a much sounder economic and educational basis, we may have other things to suggest for your consideration, but for these immediate problems of the war which concern every one of us, may we not rely on you to do these four things: To spread information about the need, to send us many of your best girls to train, to give them the soundest preparation you can for our work, and to help our hardily-pressed nursing schools by putting at their disposal any of your educational facilities which they may make use of.

The Secretary of the Committee on Nursing, of the Council of National Defense in Washington, will be glad to send you additional information about the opportunities for young women in this very attractive and satisfying field of work, the conditions of training and other details which you may wish to have. A list of the registered nursing schools in any state may be obtained from the Board of Nurse Examiners, a directory of whose officers will be found in every issue of the American Journal of Nursing (published in Rochester, New York), as well as the officers of State Nurses' Associations. The State League of Nursing Education would probably be glad to furnish speakers and to coöperate with you in other ways.